

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 07382 111732Z

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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DEPT PLEASE PASS TO TEHRAN AND DAMASCUS

E.O. 11652: XGDS 1

TAGS: PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION

REF: TEHRAN'S 5350

1. LEBANESE AMB TO IRAN, AL-KHALIL, IS LEBANESE SHI'A FROM SOUTHERNMOST DISTRICT OF TYRE. SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, PARTICULARLY TYRE, IS ABOUT AS UNSTABLE AS ANY PLACE IN THE COUNTRY, WITH PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS IN DE FACTO CONTROL. THIS SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION IN ANY EVALUATION BY KHALIL OF CURRENT LEBANESE SCENE, WHICH APPEARS TO US A BIT SIMPLISTIC.

2. THERE WERE AT LEAST THREE ASPECTS TO THE RECENT LEBANESE DISORDERS, I.E. FIRST AND FOREMOST, LEBANESE NATIONALISTS VERSUS EXTREMISTS OR LEFTIST PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS; CONSERVATIVES VERSUS LEFTIST ELEMENTS AND FINALLY, THERE WAS A MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN ASPECT PARTICULARLY AMONG THE EXTREMIST ELEMENTS OF BOTH FAITHS. THE LEBANESE NATIONALIST/PALESTINIAN CONFRONTATION WAS THE HEART OF THE CONFLICT WITH THE OTHER TWO ISSUES EMERGING, AS IS USUAL, IN LEBANON IN TIMES OF CRISIS. THEY WERE THUS ANCILLARY BUT NONETHELESS DANGEROUS FACTORS IN THE SITUATION.

3. FROM ALL EVIDENCE, THE MAIN FORCE OF PALESTINIAN ORGANIZED TROOPS WERE FORTUNATELY NOT INVOLVED, NOR WERE MAIN FORCE SHI'AS FIGHTING SUNNIS. SOME SHI'A WERE INVOLVED BUT UNDER BANNER OF

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 07382 111732Z

LEFTIST INDIGENOUS ELEMENTS.

4. A FOURTH ELEMENT INVOLVED WAS OUTLAW THUGS WHO PROFITED FROM INSECURITY TO SETTLE OLD ACCOUNTS AND SNIPE JUST FOR THE FUN OF KILLING. SOME OF THESE WERE AIDED AND ABETTED BY LIBYAN WEAPONS AND MONEY AND ALSO IRAQI BAATHIST SYMPATHIZERS JOINED THE FREE-FOR-ALL TO CONTRIBUTE TO LOCAL INSTABILITY. THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF DIRECT RUSSIAN OR CHINESE INVOLVEMENT BUT OBVIOUSLY THE RUSSIANS WERE NOT REPEAT NOT UNHAPPY OVER THE RIGHT-LEFT CONFLICT. THE CHINESE LAY DOGGO AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE.

5. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO EVALUATE ALL THE WINNERS OR LOSERS, BUT UNQUESTIONABLY A DE FACTO UNDERSTANDING OR ALLIANCE BETWEEN INDIGENOUS LEBANESE LEFT AND PALESTINIAN RADICAL ELEMENTS HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED AS A REAL THREAT TO LEBANESE SECURITY AND THE CONTINUATION OF UNREST AND TURMOIL.

6. WE DO NOT REPEAT NOT CURRENTLY CONSIDER THE SITUATION IN LEBANON AS ALMOST HOPELESS. IT WAS GRIM IN THAT CONFLICT OCCURRED THROUGHOUT GREATER PART OF CITY WITH LITTLE OR NO EVIDENT GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO STOP IT. IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT WAS ESTABLISHED THAT GOVERNMENT HAD SOME IMPACT ON SITUATION AND IT WAS NOT UNTIL KARAME WAS APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER DESIGNATE THAT SITUATION BEGAN TO CALM. ENSUING POLITICAL CRISIS HAS MAINTAINED THIS VACUUM OF STRONG LEADERSHIP AND IF A RELATIVELY STRONG GOVERNMENT IS NOT STUCK TOGETHER SOON, THE FUTURE OF THE LEBANON, AS WE KNOW IT TODAY, IS GRIM. THIS LATTER FACT, HOWEVER, IS RECOGNIZED BY ALL MODERATE LEBANESE AND WE SEE A GROWING TENDENCY TO RALLY BEHIND PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE RASHID KARAME AND TO BURY OLD POLITICAL HATREDS. THE ONLY ELEMENT THAT DOES NOT SEEM TO SHARE COMPLETELY THIS ATTITUDE COULD BE THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF.

7. LEBANON'S FRIENDS ARE FACED WITH A DILEMMA AND NO ONE CAN SEE WHAT CAN BE DONE OTHER THAN TO PREACH MODERATION, NEGOTIATION OF CESSATION OF BLOODSHED, ETC. THIS IS THE ATTITUDE ADOPTED BY THE FRENCH, THE BRITISH, THE EGYPTIANS, SAUDIS AND OURSELVES. THE ONLY DRAMATIC DISSENTERS APPEAR TO BE THE LIBYANS AND THE IRAQIS, WHO CONTINUE TO ADD FUEL TO THE FLAMES.

8. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING IN BAGHDAD, BUT IT
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 07382 111732Z

DOES OCCUR TO US THAT THE SHAH MIGHT CONTRIBUTE CONSTRUCTIVELY TO THE LEBANESE SOLUTION BY COUNSELING IRAQI DISENGAGEMENT FROM THE LOCAL LEBANESE SCENE. ALL EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT IRAQI BAATH ELEMENTS ARE CONTRIBUTING GENEROUSLY MONEY AND WEAPONS TO THE LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN LEFT AND HOPING TO BE ABLE TO COUNTER THE ROLE OF SYRIAN DIRECTED SAIQA PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS WHICH UP UNTIL NOW HAVE REMAINED ALOOF FROM THE LEBANESE CONFLICT AND WHICH HAVE DURING THE LAST TWO MONTHS BEEN A DISCIPLINED MODERATING

ELEMENT.

9. AS WE HAVE REPORTED MANY TIMES, THERE IS NO RESOLUTION OF THE BASIC PROBLEM OF LEBANESE/PALESTINIAN RELATIONS UNTIL THERE IS A SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB/ISRAELI ISSUE OR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PALESTINIAN STATE. THE PROBLEM, HOWEVER, CAN BE CONTAINED BUT IT REQUIRES A STRONG PRIME MINISTER WITH THE CONFIDENCE OF THE LEBANESE PUBLIC, THE PALESTINIANS, THE SYRIANS AND TO A LESSER EXTENT THE OTHER ARAB STATES. KARAME COULD BE SUCH A MAN AND CONSEQUENTLY THE CRICIAL ISSUE AT THE MOMENT IS WHETHER HE CAN FORM A REPRESENTATIVE AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT. IF HE CAN'T, AS WE COMMENTED ABOVE, THERE IS DEEP CAUSE FOR CONCERN FOR LEBANESE STABILITY.

10. IN PASSING THIS TO TEHRAN AND DAMASCUS, HOPE DEPARTMENT WILL GIVE US BENEFIT ITS VIEWS.
GODLEY

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